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ABSTRACT

The document is the result of research conducted on 14 Indian reservations and one settlement in the Southwest, Midwest, West, and Pacific Northwest by Illinois State University in the summer of 1970. Some 124 Indians were interviewed, many of whom were leaders and participants in various Red Power organizations. As noted, the dominant impression to emerge from the research was that Indians have become very aware that they, collectively, can materially transfigure their own lives for the better. They have also become aware that other racial and ethnic groups have culturally expressive institutions. Indians have been lacking detectable political power and have been unable to control education of their own children; consequently , they have gravitated to the brink of cultural extinction. It is reported that the recent vigilance of the Indian springs from a disconcerting realization that he must now mobilize every vestige of power to provide for this cultural continuity. The document concludes that Red Power and educational renaissance are both requisite to the regeneration of Indian culture. (FL)

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"Red Power" And Indian Education

"Red Power" is essential for genuinely Indian education. This is the prevailing tribal American attitude the writer detected in a research of fourteen reservations and one settlement in the Southwest, Midwest, West, and Pacific Northwest, a project funded by Illinois State University, during the summer of 1970. A total of 124 Indians were interviewed, many of them leaders or participants in various Red Power organizations.

The dominant impression to emerge from the in-depth, tape-recorded interviews was that Indians have become very aware that they, collectively, can materially transfigure their own lives for the better. Nationalism has animated the Indian spirit. Many expressed a keen awareness of the nationalist revolutions of Asia and Africa and the American civil rights movement. It is as if, under the impact of the international and national revolutions of rising expectations, tribal nationalisms, long submerged, have finally surfaced after a long sleep. The catalyst for the new Indian nationalism resides in renewed hope, a catharsis of fatalism and alienation, that has impelled the Red Man into politics. And it is through political activism that the native American has begun to exercise a voice in educational decision-making.

Self-reliant Indians have endeavored to transform their schools on a number of occasions. Perhaps the most important Indian-administered educational institution is the Navahos' Rough

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Rock Demonstration School, reported in the February, 1967 issue of American Education. Other manifestations of Red Power include the Mesquakies' struggle to win control of their own school near Tama, Iowa and the demand of the United Indians of All Tribes on Alcatraz Island for an Indian educational and cultural center. The attitudes the writer detected in his research indicate that these types of educational expressions of Red Power will undoubtedly proliferate. Indian school board membership, attendance at PTA meetings, and entry into the teaching profession, for example, should increase markedly.

The great majority of Indians interviewed find it no longer acceptable to stoically endure privation. They seem to have abruptly denied the fatalism that has until now led them to accept their plight. They seem increasingly inclined to turn their anger outward into activism, cultural and political, rather than inward into apathy, suicide, and alcoholism. They are very much looking for their own Selmas. This is their attitudinal revolution: the unleashing of a flood tide of frustration that is extremely difficult to stem with paternalism once in motion. Indian leaders have become seriously politically active in the National Congress of American Indians, founded in 1944, and local and regional groups, such as Indians United for Survival in Nisqually, Washington, Coalition of American Indian Citizens in Denver, and United Native Americans in San Francisco. The delegates of 40 tribes convened at Princeton University on March 25, 1970 to discuss ways to

mobilize Indian political power to improve their condition. They called for militancy in the pursuit of Indian advancement. (Editor: See enclosed photo no. 1.) This is the ethos that is generally incipient in the Indian community.

The Indian interviewees believe they very much need a post-high school institution totally committed to Indian needs. A few mentioned they want an institution resembling Negro "freedom schools" or Howard University. They aspire to train Indians for authentic tribal leadership rather than mere "Uncle Tomahawk" (the Indian equivalent of "Uncle Tom") accommodation. They hope that, through the cultivation of Indian leadership, the entire Indian community can advance as a group, rather than regressing as its most promising young people are siphoned off into Anglo-American society. They feel Indian-controlled elementary and high schools, colleges, and universities could educate an emancipated, thoroughly Indian elite and help students develop a pride in their native American heritage. They claim that the present policy of sending Indian young people to white schools denigrates Indian dignity and the capacity for self-sufficiency, and that too many of the best Indians have been co-opted in this way, induced into a bi-cultural life, a limbo "between two cultures," as the anthropologists have popularly explained it. The interviewees believe almost unanimously that intrinsically Indian education presents the most powerful antidote to the inferiority complex and insecurity that plague the Indian. Indian education, they maintain, produces graduates who advocate unrelentingly that Indian culture is sacred and worth

preserving.

The fount of the contemporary Red Power Movement traces to the group of young Indian activists educated in the universities after World War II and Korea. The Indian draftees experienced the modern world of the white man in those wars; they wanted to learn more about that world when they returned from overseas and how they might fit into it. Some of the most inquisitive attended college under the GI Bill. The number of Indian youth attending college for one year or more rose from 6,500 to 17,000 in the decade 1950 to 1960. The number of Navaho students alone rose from a mere three dozen annually immediately after World War II to more than 400 in the early sixties. The Indian collegians learned much about the non-tribal world but also soon knew that their place in that world was at best marginal, that the white man's way was not sufficient for them. This disquieting discovery impelled the young Indian intelligentsia to aim at self-determination in education and other realms rather than full-fledged assimilation. They sought, in short, to forge a liberating pluralism for themselves. University education functioned, thus, as the formal course work following the abrupt and involuntary matriculation into white values achieved in the barracks. It was as much alienating as it was informative.

The Indians began to organize politically in the post-war era. They worked assiduously through the National Congress of American Indians and the National Education Conference. They have more recently organized at regional, local, and tribal levels. The most

important organization among college-enrolled Indians is the National Indian Youth Council. The NIYC, founded in 1961, has earned a reputation as the SNCC of Indian affairs. The entire panoply of Indian politics has unquestionably shattered the myth of the silent and vanishing Indian and done much to convert Indian alienation into effective participation.

The Indian no longer relies on evoking liberal guilt feelings to stimulate reform. The research subjects stressed that change will come only through united Indian involvement in the political process. The program of the California Indian Education Association and United Native Americans is exemplary. They have built a substantial grass-roots movement that is having a considerable impact on the schools. The consequence is that Indian citizens now help to develop and select curricula, serve on school boards, and administer and control teacher training programs. They are insuring that the schools will teach Indian history and culture and hire Indian teachers, resource people, and teacher aides. Don Wanatee, Secretary of the recalcitrant Mesquakie Tribe of Iowa expresses the pan-tribal national mood aptly, "I think it is time that the Indian people throughout the United States are given the right to choose what their children should learn and must learn in order to preserve their tribal ways." Mr. Wanatee and his fellow Indians do not particularly seek confrontation with white America in articulating this desire. They realize that their most significant struggle inheres not in inflammatory resistance but the intellectual

re-creation of a vibrant tribalism that will eventually transform Federal policy. However, they remain capable of warlike militancy, as a final resource, should cautious Red Power fail.

The informants often commented that their struggle for freedom requires intellectual nurture in order to sustain it. The leaders of the Red Power Movement on Alcatraz invoked this attitude in their ultimatum for an Indian educational and cultural center. Alcatraz invader Joseph L. Morris, a Blackfoot leader from Montana, was tersely belligerent: "We're going to dig in and go ahead with our plans to build an Indian educational center. We're not going to leave until we get what we came for." Bernie Whitebear, Chairman of the United Indians of All Tribes, interpreted the invasion as "the beginning of a new revolution for the American Indian." The interviewees applaud the Alcatraz non-negotiable demand. One young Indian activist in Nisqually, Washington stressed the significance of an Indian institution of higher learning: "In order for Indians to survive we must build intellectual and cultural centers, like universities and museums, where our most gifted young people can know their history, adapting it to our contemporary problems." He is an exponent of the fear that the Indian presence on Earth may soon be no more. He intuits that self-affirming education is the only reliable method for tribal Americans to guarantee their historic identity.

Indian political activism certainly embraces increasing participation in educational decisions. Political power and educational self-determination are merely opposite sides of the same coin. For

example, the Rough Rock Demonstration School and the United Indians of All Tribes' plan for an educational center on Alcatraz Island exemplify interrelated phenomena. They constitute pan-Indian consciousness surfacing at a specific, historical juncture after having been long submerged. The Indians, inspired by their new political awareness, have imagined community control of their schools and an inter-tribal educational center to preserve and transmit their historic tradition. They maintain that all other racial and ethnic groups have culturally-expressive universities, colleges, and schools, here or abroad, that are viable foci for a secure identity. The Jews, Blacks, Catholics, Chicanos, Swedes, and Presbyterians all enjoy intellectual institutions that protect and perpetuate their ancient cultural heritages. But the Indian, lacking detectable political power until now, has been unable to control the education of his own children. He has consequently gravitated to the brink of cultural extinction. His recent vigilance springs from a disconcerting realization that he must now mobilize every vestige of power to provide for his cultural continuity. He points readily in an interview situation to the ineluctable reality that Red Power and educational renaissance are both requisite to the regeneration of Indian culture.

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